Enjoying Whitehorse Trails
Yukon River
Canyon
City of Whitehorse
YUKON
ENERGY

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LEGEND

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Yukon Energy Corporation,
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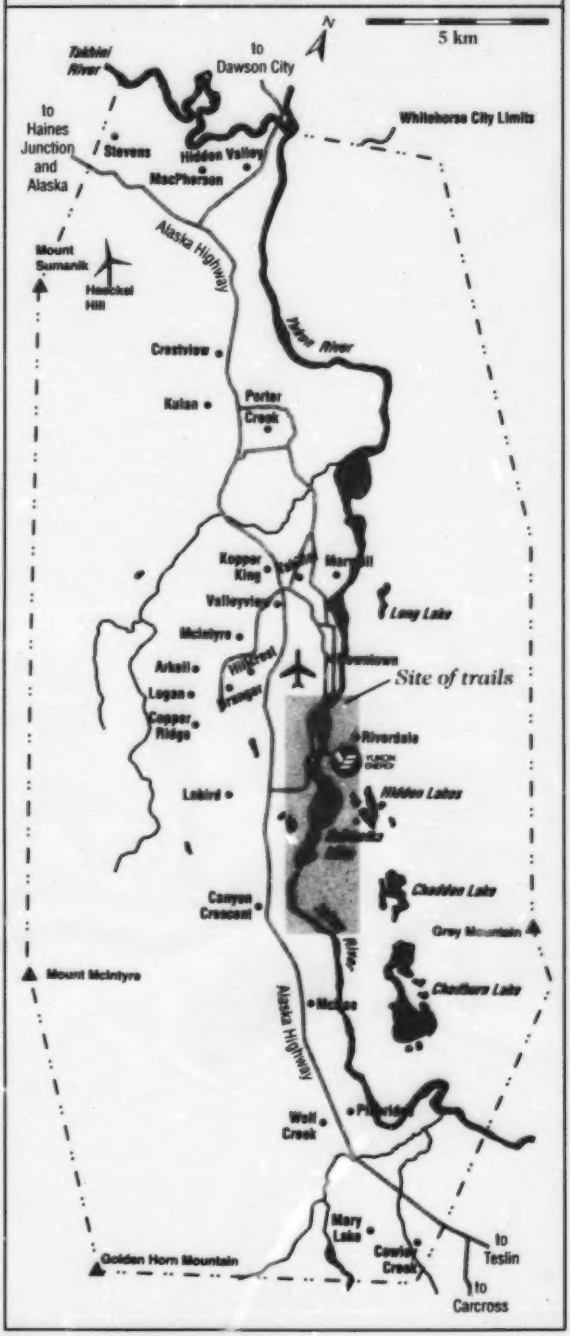
Unless otherwise credited, all photos by Peter Long.

One in a series of local guides. Also available: *Exploring the Whitehorse Fishway* and *Viewing Whitehorse from above: A guide to Haeckel Hill • Thay T'äw.*

Overview of the City of Whitehorse



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Welcome to the trails

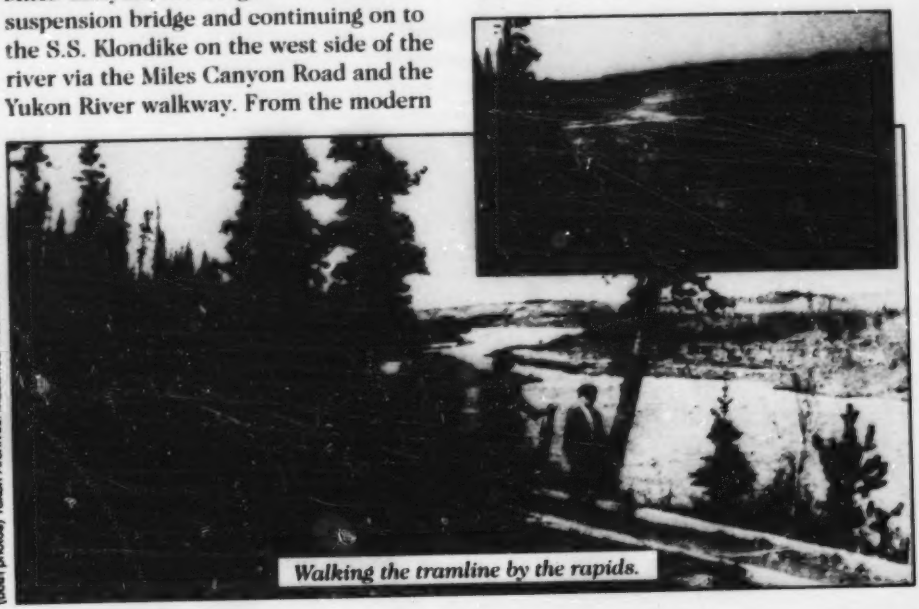
"I know about the Miles Canyon and Whitehorse Rapids. My grandmother told me about it. We use to come and fish, gaff salmon and spear salmon there, in the rapids area, when they come close to shore. They go up the river and they use to hunt across the river where Riverdale is. They get moose there. Moose, and people use to live there. They dry fish. We use to go all over the place...." Ronald Bill, 1995

The trails along the Yukon River in Whitehorse are very special. They were used by countless generations of First Nations people on their travels around the fearsome Whitehorse Rapids. Later, newcomers in search of gold and adventure used the same trails in their race to the Klondike gold fields. Now, residents and visitors alike tramp along the shores of the Yukon River and Schwatka Lake.

This guide describes the trail system as it follows the east side of the Yukon River from the Robert Campbell Bridge, along Schwatka Lake, then on to the abandoned gold rush settlement of Canyon City. The trail then returns to Miles Canyon, crossing the river at the suspension bridge and continuing on to the S.S. Klondike on the west side of the river via the Miles Canyon Road and the Yukon River walkway. From the modern power generating facility to the ancient lava flows, from the tiny northern plants to the limestone mass of Grey Mountain, there is much to capture your interest and imagination. Within minutes of a modern urban centre, you will be walking in the northern boreal forest where all sense of the city disappears.

You can take a 20-minute walk on just part of the trail or spend the day and hike the entire loop. Along the way, there are several places to park your vehicle so you can walk just parts of the trail. Design a walk to suit your needs!

We hope you enjoy these trails and that, for the pleasure of others, you leave them as you found them.



Walking the tramline by the rapids.

(both photos) Yukon Archives, MacBride Museum Coll. 3888, 3889 (inset)

The land under your feet

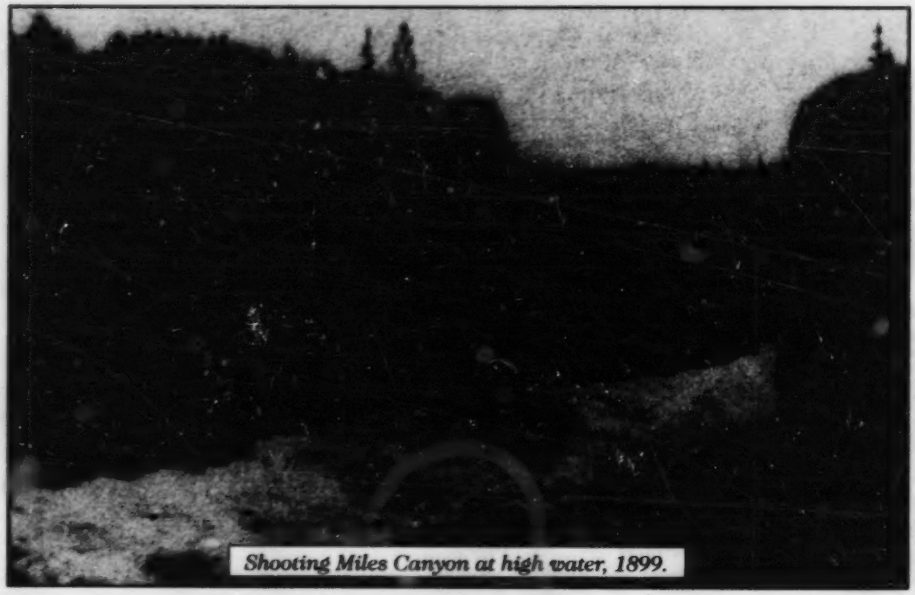
You are walking in the Yukon River valley carved over millennia by glaciers and water. The mountains you see around you are part of a seven-kilometre-thick layer of sedimentary rocks between 160 and 210 million years old. These rocks are mainly sandstone, limestone and conglomerate (a variety of rocks cemented together). Grey Mountain, to the east, was formed from limestone. To the west, a belt of limestone contains the copper deposits of the Whitehorse Copper Belt.

Along much of the trail, you will also see dark-coloured basaltic rocks that form part of the valley floor in the area. This porous rock is from a volcanic lava flow over eight million years ago. Some scientists think that the lava came from a fissure in Golden Horn Mountain to the south.

During the last great ice age, glaciers covered this part of the southern Yukon. Up until about 14,000 years ago, the valley sat under nearly a kilometre of ice. The sea of ice completely covered Grey Mountain and all but the top of Golden Horn Mountain. The glacier rounded off the mountains and carved out a U-shaped valley.

About 9,000 to 11,000 years ago, the ice sheets began to melt and retreat towards the southeast. As the ice retreated, the sediments trapped in the ice melted out, leaving the rounded hills and knife edge ridges of gravel, sand and rock that you see in the valley today.

Sometimes, large blocks of ice broke off the retreating glacier and became buried in these sediments. Over hundreds of years, these icebergs melted, leaving kettle-like depressions. Some of these



Shooting Miles Canyon at high water, 1899.

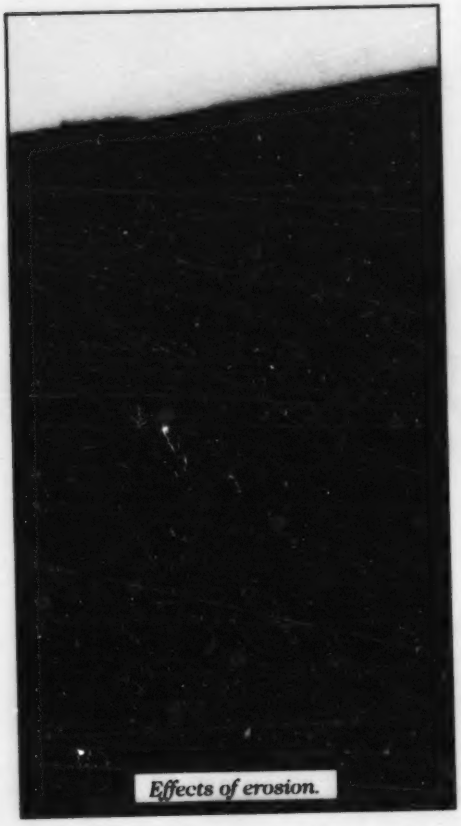
Yukon Archives, Emil Forrest Coll. 80/60, #6

filled with water and became lakes. Chadburn Lake and the Hidden Lakes are examples of this.

At the same time, ice dams in the Yukon and Takhini (Southern Tutchone name, *Näkhu chù*) river valleys prevented the melt water from escaping. A huge lake formed, extending from Haines Junction in the west to Marsh Lake (*Tàkwädàdà*) in the east and Lake Laberge (*Ta'an Man*) in the north. As the silts from the glacier entered the lake, they were deposited in the distinct layers or bands that you can see today in the clay cliffs along the river in Whitehorse.

When the ice dams broke, the lake waters rushed out, carving the beginnings of the modern river channel. The Yukon River continued carving through the soft silt deposits of the ancient lake bottom to form the valley where downtown Whitehorse sits today.

Since that time, the soil has been accumulating, though it's a slow process in the cold, dry climate of the Yukon. If you look at places where the river bank has been cut away, you will see little soil buildup over the gravel. Notice that often you can see a distinct strip of white dust in the ground. This is called the White River ash layer, deposited by a volcanic eruption in eastern Alaska some 1,200 years ago. Not much soil has built up over that white ash.



Effects of erosion.

Clay cliffs in the winter.

Nature along the Yukon River

At 3,185 kilometres, the Yukon River is the fifth longest river in North America. The blue-green colours of the water are a result of the glacial sediments and remind us that the icy birthplace of the river is not far away.

A popular view of the north has us buried under tons of snow in the winter. In fact, the climate in Whitehorse is semi-arid, meaning it is very dry. The Coastal Mountains, only 100 kilometres away, put this area into a rain shadow. Precipitation averages 268 centimetres each year, about half of that falling in the summer. Whitehorse's proximity to the ocean, 180 kilometres to the south, means that we benefit from warmer south winds, which moderate temperatures. Generally, however, our winters are dry and cold.

Whitehorse lies in an upland forest with stands of lodgepole pine, spruce and aspen. Along the trail, you will also see poplar, willow and, near the water, groves of alder. While the trees are not large by southern standards, many are quite old. Trees here grow very slowly due to dry conditions and harsh winters.

Early view of Hepburn tramway.

Univ. of Washington Libraries, Special Coll. Division, #11586

Streamside alders.

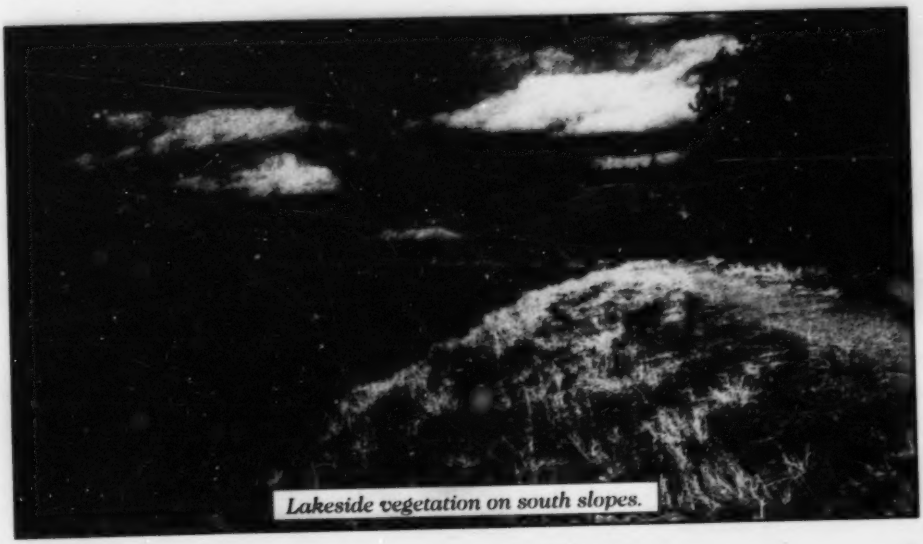
As you walk the trail, you will travel close to the water through forest and along the river. The trail also crosses dry, grassy hillsides and the clay cliffs themselves. Many plants have adapted well to the dry, thin soil conditions in the Yukon River valley. Depending on the time of year, you will see a wide variety of wild flowers. The Miles Canyon area is a popular local spot to look for crocuses in late April and early May. Other plants, such as wild rose, spotted saxifrage and Yukon Beardtongue, grow in this dry, rocky soil. In the nearby woods, you can find Arctic lupines, elegant death camas and bluebells.

Remember that, in the north, it takes a long time to grow even the smallest of plants. Please leave the flowers and plants for others to enjoy.

The river valley is also home to northern wildlife. Even this close to the city, you may see beaver, otter, coyotes, arctic ground squirrels, snowshoe hares and, possibly, moose, black bear and mule deer.

Mid-river islands and sandbars.

In the woods, some of the birds you will see include Gray Jays, magpies, juncos, robins, Bohemian Waxwings, hawks and Pine Grosbeaks. Schwatka Lake and the backwaters along the river are gathering spots for many waterfowl, gulls and eagles. Cliff swallows nest along some stretches of the river bank and in Miles Canyon. The clay cliffs are a good place to watch for ravens. These large, intelligent birds seem to delight in playing in the updrafts along the steep banks. You may also see Bald Eagles riding the air currents near the clay cliffs or searching the edges of the river for fish and game.



Lakeside vegetation on south slopes.

History of the valley

First Nations

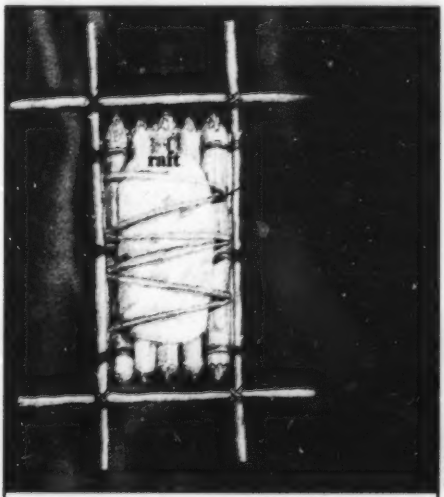
The Whitehorse area is within the traditional lands of the Ta'an Kwäch'än and the Kwanlin Dün First Nations. (Kwanlin is the Southern Tutchone word for Miles Canyon and means "water running through a narrow place.") Most members of these two First Nations are Southern Tutchone speakers who, in turn, are part of the vast Athapaskan family found in the Yukon, Northwest Territories and as far south as Nevada.

It is believed that several distinct First Nations cultures have flourished and disappeared from this area over the last 10,000 years. There is evidence that people hunted along the edges of the great glacial lake which filled this valley. They followed the migrating herds of caribou as they in turn followed the retreating ice southward. When the lake drained, it left a huge grassy plain where buffalo herds thrived. As spruce forests replaced grasslands, moose moved to this area and the buffalo disappeared. The First Nations people adapted, becoming moose hunters instead.

After the glaciers melted, and the Yukon River began to flow again, salmon became an important new food source for First Nations. During the salmon's migration up the river, the First Nations people came to fish. People tended to use the same campsites year after year, but they did not build large, permanent settlements. Sometimes, several families would gather at a fish camp to help catch and dry the salmon. It was an important time for renewing acquaintances and catching up on news. There were many camps along this section of river and one of these, *Kwanlin*, was at the site of the present-day Robert Service Campground.

Hunting, fishing, gathering and trading were all part of the seasonal travels for the First Nations people, who moved to where food sources were abundant. While there are stories of people braving the rapids on rafts and moose skin boats, they mostly used the trails to bypass the rough water. The people travelled through here regularly, moving from *Ta'an Man* (Lake Laberge) in the north, to *Tàkwädàdà* (Marsh Lake) in the south.

This was also a jumping off spot for the trail to *U zela* (Fish Lake), west of Whitehorse. Although the river was a



Rob Ingram

First Nations people transported dried fish and meat through the raging waters on self-guiding rafts. Long poles deflected the raft back into the current when it hit the canyon walls. At the foot of the rapids, the raft would drift into an eddy and be retrieved with a gaff. Raft description from stories told to David Bunbury by his grandfather, Frankie Jim, both members of the Ta'an Kwäch'än First Nation.

great food source during the summer salmon runs, people usually gathered at the larger lakes in the winter where they could catch lake trout and whitefish through the ice and hunt moose in the forests.

The people of the southern Yukon were part of an extensive trade network that extended far down the British Columbia coast. Traders from other inland people and coastal First Nations travelled here regularly. The furs, skins and meat of the Yukon were traded for fish oils, cedar products and rare sea shells, amongst other things. Through this trade system, the people of the Yukon interior were familiar with European trade goods several decades before any non-native people entered their territory.

The gold rush, and before

Before the late 19th century, it was very difficult to enter the Yukon through the coastal passes as they were tightly guarded by the coastal Tlingit people. By controlling the main access to the interior of the Yukon, the Tlingit held a monopoly on trade with the interior First Nations people.

Beginning in the 1840s, a few traders and explorers trickled into the territory from the north and east. In 1848, Hudson's Bay Company trader Robert Campbell built a trading post at Fort Selkirk in the Yukon's interior. The Chilkat Tlingit saw him as an interloper and, in 1852, sent a raiding party over 600 kilometres, from near Haines, Alaska to Fort Selkirk, to run him off. (The bridge between downtown Whitehorse and Riverdale is named after him.)

It was not until the 1880s that the American navy convinced the Tlingit to allow prospectors through the passes. Most came via the White Pass and Chilkoot Pass and followed the Yukon River north, using the existing trails.

Jenny and Jack Shakoon in the Canadiana *at the Whitehorse waterfront, ca. 1915.*

Yukon Archives, MacBride Museum Coll. #3961

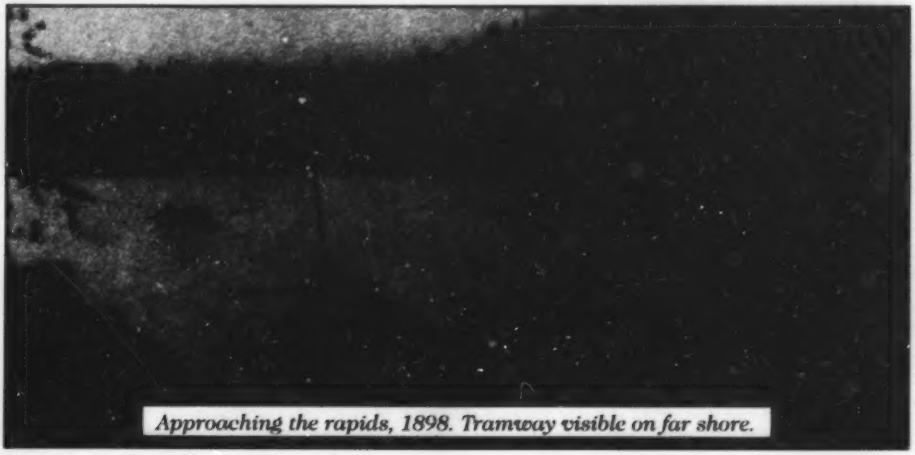
In 1897, when news of the big Klondike gold strike of August 1896 reached the outside world, the rush was on. Thousands of people poured through Skagway and Dyea, in Alaska, en route to the goldfields around Dawson City. Most crossed the passes and built rafts or crude boats at Bennett Lake. From there, they could float all the way to Dawson City and their dreams of Eldorado.

On May 29, 1898, the ice went out on Lake Bennett. Within 48 hours, over 7,000 boats were floating downriver to Dawson City. However, first, there were two major impediments: Miles Canyon and the Whitehorse Rapids.

Until the construction of the Whitehorse dam, this stretch of the Yukon River was all but unnavigable. Within a few days of the arrival of thousands of boats, at least 150 of them were lost to the Whitehorse Rapids and 10 people drowned. The Northwest Mounted Police directed that only experienced pilots could take the rafts and boats through.

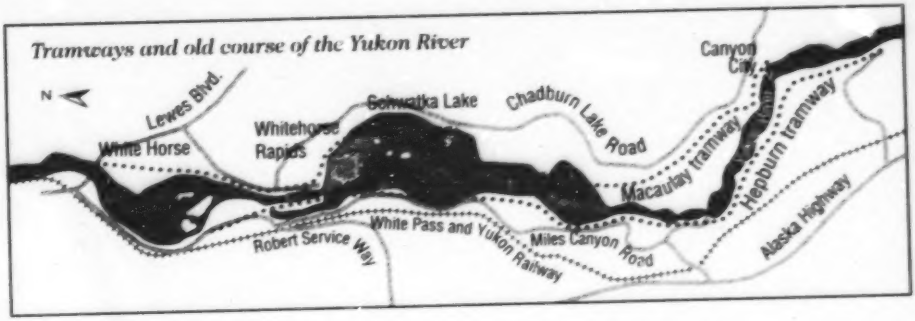
Beginning in June 1898, the alternative to the rapids was Norman Macaulay's "Canyon and White Horse Rapids Tramway," on the east side of the river. By late summer, there was the competing "Miles Canyon & Lewes River Tramway," set up on the west side by John Hepburn. Both operations used horse-drawn carts running on wooden rails to move boats, supplies and equipment around the canyon and rapids. Canyon City sprouted up at the head of Macaulay's rails and the original settlement of White Horse began at its terminus, in present-day Riverdale.

> *We sped through the canyon. There was a breath-taking interval before we were swept into the seething cauldron of the White Horse Rapids, where so many venturesome souls had lost their lives and outfits. Half-way through our steering oar broke with a crack like that of a pistol shot, above the roaring waters. For a tense moment the boat whirled half her length about in the current. Captain Spencer quickly seized another oar, calling coolly, "Never mind boys! Let her go stern to." A second's hesitation and our lives would have paid the penalty.*
>
> Martha Louise Black, 1898



Approaching the rapids, 1898. Tramway visible on far shore.

Yukon Archives, Vancouver Public Library Coll. #2229



After the rush

When it looked like the gold might last forever, the Close Brothers of England thought they could make a fortune with a railway running from tidewater at Skagway right to the goldfields in Dawson. To provide a right of way for the White Pass & Yukon Railway and eliminate competition, the company bought out both the tramways for $185,000 in July 1899.

In the fall of 1899, the company laid out a townsite across the river from the little community of White Horse and tried to call it Closeleigh. However, at the insistence of the Yukon's Commissioner, it was called White Horse (later changed to Whitehorse). In July 1900, the brand-new town celebrated the completion of the railway from Skagway.

Whitehorse quickly became a company town. The White Pass & Yukon Route set up its river division, the British Yukon Navigation Company, over the winter of 1900-01. Soon, the company held a virtual monopoly on sternwheeler traffic plying the upper Yukon River from the headwater lakes to the Alaskan border. Whitehorse became the transportation centre of the territory.

For most of its history, Whitehorse has had a large transient population. First Nations people continued to travel throughout the area, but now stopped to shop in town and work on the sternwheelers and in the wood camps. Outsiders came north to work the sternwheelers, leaving the Yukon as the rivers froze for the winter.

Squatter communities grew up along the river to accommodate this transient lifestyle. One community, known as Whiskey Flats, occupied land on the downtown side of what is now the Robert Campbell Bridge.

The construction of the Alaska Highway during World War II helped to transform Whitehorse into a major centre. In 1953, Whitehorse became the seat of the Yukon government. As the territory's population grew, Whitehorse became important as the headquarters for many government agencies and attracted more mining companies and retailers.

Along with the prosperity came southern sensibilities. By the mid-1970s, Whiskey Flats was cleared of its dwellings. It is now the site of Rotary Peace Park and the national historic site, *S.S. Klondike*.

Once the bane of the river traveller, the Whitehorse rapids have now been tamed by the high water levels that resulted from the building of the dam. However, through the years, the river trails have continued to be well used for recreation by residents and visitors.

Getting ready to hike!

The trail is divided into sections and parking areas are indicated. Some people may choose to walk the entire trail system, from downtown and back again, as a pleasant day-long outing. Others may choose other starting points and walk one or two sections at a time. You can park your vehicle at your starting point and return to it by retracing your steps. Or, if you have access to two vehicles, you can park one at the end point, and after the walk, drive it back to pick up the first vehicle.

The route is described, and the trails on the map are marked, in a clockwise fashion. We have provided an approximate time to walk each section in one direction only. It is just an estimate, however, and assumes that walkers are accustomed to using woodland trails. The time estimate allows for occasional stops to explore and to enjoy the scenery. For a return along the same route, just double the time.

Most of the trails are easy grades and fairly level. No matter what time of year you are walking, wear good walking shoes or boots. Much of the route is well used and should not require heavy hiking boots. Always look out for rocks, roots, stumps and branches that may be on the pathway.

Parents of small children should be watchful, especially when near the more treacherous dropoffs such as at Miles Canyon.

Most of the route is off limits to motorized vehicles. However, you may encounter bicyclists at any point along the way.

Summer is mosquito and black fly season. Go prepared with insect repellent. Light-coloured clothing is recommended and, if you are particularly susceptible to insect bites, long pants and long shirtsleeves are a good idea.

Carry a jacket. Cool winds can blow up off the lake or river at any time. Bringing water is advisable as you can work up a good thirst on your walk. Don't drink river or lake water without boiling it first.

There are many places where you can enjoy a picnic lunch. Please pack out any garbage or deposit it in the appropriate containers. There may be outhouses available at some locations during the summer. Whitehorse city by-laws state that there can be no campfires along this route. The only exception to this is in the fire pits at the Robert Service Campground.

If you take your dog, use a leash. City by-laws require all dogs to be leashed. You may feel like you are in the wilderness, but, in fact, you are still within Whitehorse city limits.

Please ensure that you put any valuables in your trunk or out of sight and lock your vehicle.

Before heading out, it is a good idea to prepare yourself by reading *Into the Yukon Wilderness*, a Renewable Resources publication. This has general information on safety and how to prepare to travel off the road. Their *Yukon's Wildlife Viewing Guide* will help you to understand more about Yukon wildlife.

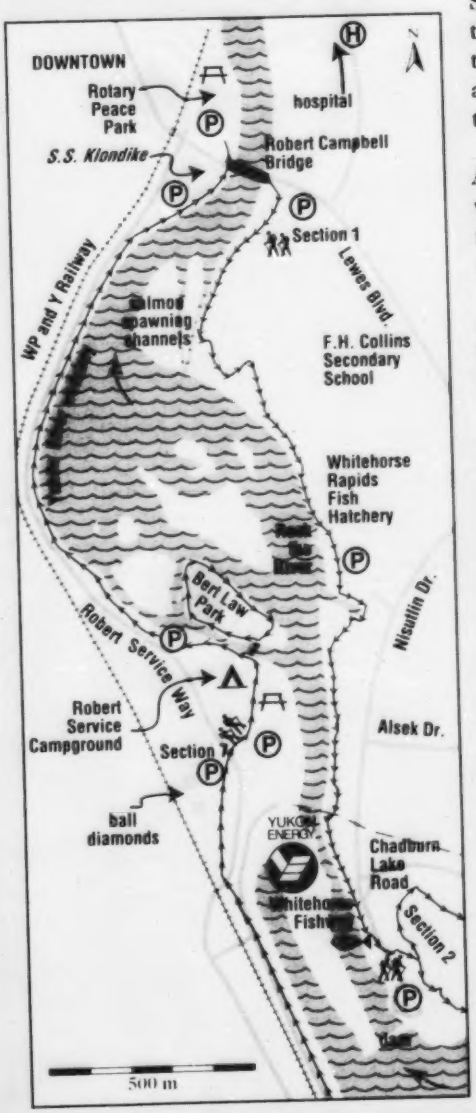
Section 1

Yukon River: Robert Campbell Bridge to Whitehorse Fishway

Distance: 2.25 kilometres

Time: 30 to 45 minutes

Difficulty: An easy section of trail. It's level all the way, with a slight incline



Parking and starting point: Park at Second Heaven skateboard park near the Robert Campbell Bridge, or park at the *S.S. Klondike* or Rotary Peace Park and then cross the bridge on foot. The trail starts behind the skateboard park.

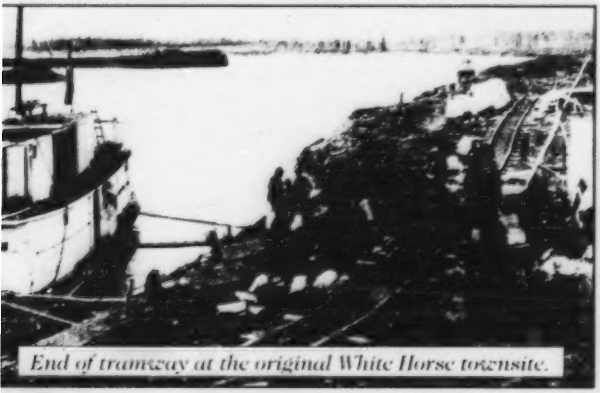
Along the trail: The trail stays mostly within sight of the river. There are numerous side trails but, when in doubt, stay near the water.

As you set out on the trail, you will enter a fairly heavy willow growth area. Soon, this opens out into a forest of pine, spruce and aspen.

The flat area near the beginning of the trail is reportedly a burial site for stampeders who drowned trying to shoot the rapids. This is also where the Canyon and White Horse Rapids Tramway ended and the original community of White Horse began.

At several points along the way, you will see whittled tree stumps that are evidence of beavers at work. Beavers tend to cut deciduous trees, here, the aspen and poplar. They eat the bark and leaves and use the branches and trunks for building their dams and lodges. These large rodents are active mostly at night but you may be lucky and see them swimming in the river at any time.

You may also see people fishing along the banks of the river. The predominant sport fish is the Arctic grayling. Salmon runs in this area are very sensitive to over-fishing and sport and commercial fishing of salmon species is not allowed near Whitehorse.



End of tramway at the original White Horse townsite.

Yukon Archives, McLennan Coll. #6525

Occasionally, northern pike, whitefish, and lake trout are also caught in these waters.

After following the trail through the woods, you will soon come out into a large cleared area of shoreline behind the Whitehorse Rapids Fish Hatchery. Here, chinook salmon fry are raised to help restock the Yukon River and some of the tributary creeks in the Whitehorse area. (There is no public access to the hatchery.)

During the summer, you may spot kayakers in the white water around the concrete breakwater and below the dam. This sport has proven so popular in Whitehorse that the Canoe and Kayak Club initiated the Rock the River project to set boulders in the river, thus creating a challenging kayaking course.

There is a small creek about half way along the trail. At the mouth of the creek are several basalt boulders. These porous, dark brown rocks are pieces of the lava flows that form Miles Canyon and the banks of the river at the dam. Watch for signs of a beaver dam in the creek.

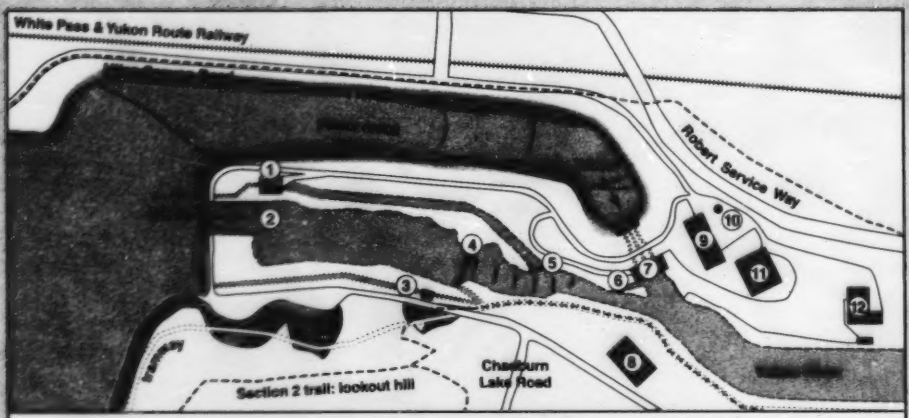
The trail begins to rise as you approach Yukon Energy's Whitehorse Rapids generating facility. Construction of this facility greatly changed the flow of the river and tamed the famous Whitehorse Rapids. There is a viewpoint overlooking the water and the dam with an explanation of the safety concerns in the area.

Finally, you will come to the Whitehorse Fishway, open daily in the summer for tours. It is the longest wooden fish ladder in the world. Salmon using it have travelled from the ocean over 3,000 kilometres away. Other fish species use it as well.

Opposite the fish ladder you can take the trail up the hillside to continue with Section 2 of the trail, or take the Chadburn Lake Road around to the lakeside to continue with Section 3.

Landing at the foot of Whitehorse Rapids, 1895.

Yukon Archives, Coutts Coll. 82/358 #3



Whitehorse Rapids Generating Facility

The Yukon Energy Corporation is the primary producer and transmitter of electrical energy in the Yukon. It distributes electrical power to wholesale and industrial customers, and to retail customers in Dawson City, Faro, Mayo, Champagne and other rural areas throughout the Yukon.

Construction of the dam began in 1957. Energy is now generated by four run-of-river turbines.Two turbines⑦ were built in 1958, and in 1969, a third one⑦ was added. Water for these enters from the power canal with its log booms. With the addition of the fourth turbine① in 1985, capacity was doubled to 40 MW. There is an 18-metre height difference (or head) at the dam. Excess water in the summer and fall passes through the spillway②.

There are seven diesel generators⑨ which together generate up to 25 MW. The diesel storage tank⑩ holds about one day's worth of fuel when all Whitehorse diesel units are generating.

The new administration and technical services building⑫, constructed to replace facilities destroyed by a fire on October 30, 1997, has won a national energy efficiency design award.

Power from the site is joined, via the Whitehorse Rapids substation⑪, to the WAF (Whitehorse/Aishihik/Faro) power grid at the Riverdale switching station⑧. Also part of the system are the wind turbines on Haeckel Hill.

A number of features are incorporated into the plant to aid fish passage. The most visible, the fishway③, was built at the same time as the dam to help migrating salmon bypass the dam to reach their spawning grounds. The fishway has underwater viewing windows where the fish can be seen. Eggs are taken from fish to use in the fish hatchery. An average of 1,000 salmon pass here each year.

Other aids for the fish are screens on the tailrace⑤ and a diversion canal⑥ to stop fish ascending to the turbines, a fish weir④ to divert fish to the ladder, and turbine design to help downstream passage of the young fish.

In addition to salmon, you may see other fish in the fishway, including Arctic grayling, a beautiful fish with a tall dorsal fin. Grayling range in colour from dark gray through gold, green and aquamarine blue. You may also see longnose suckers and tiny sculpin with their squat heads and large, stiff pectoral fins that they use for clinging to rocks on the river bottom.

Section 2

Lookout hill: Whitehorse Fishway to Schwatka Lake

Distance: 1.5 kilometres

Time: 30 to 45 minutes

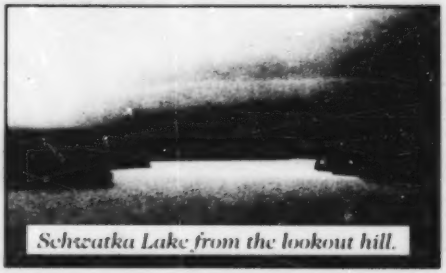
Difficulty: There are some tricky parts to this section. Initially, it is on a very loose rocky track. This quickly changes to a sandy switchback trail that takes you to the hilltop overlooking the dam and the fishway. The last part of the trail is steep with loose gravel.

Parking and starting point: Park at the fishway. The trail starts opposite the information building.

Along the trail: As you ascend, note the work that's been done to stabilize the trail.

At the top of the last switchback, you can continue towards Schwatka Lake along the front of the hill, or you can turn left (back towards town) and follow the trail through the forest around the backside of the hill. There are views over the Riverdale neighbourhood. The trail climbs steadily at the end.

If you take the trail around the front of the hill, as you get near the top, bear left (east) on the wide trail along the edge of the spruce woods, around the sandy hillock. (The old trail along the cliff face has eroded badly and is not safe.) After a short walk, there is a quick, steep, sandy climb to the top.



Schwatka Lake from the lookout hill.

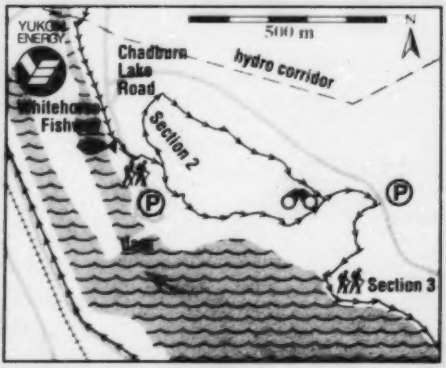
No matter which way you go, you will emerge onto a grassy hilltop (X on bird's-eye view sketch) with a spectacular view of Schwatka Lake, the river valley and the surrounding mountains.

The hill you are standing on is sand and gravel left from the melting glacier. The soil is thin on these hilltops but it supports a fairly rare plant community with plants like the needle and thread grass and Indian rice grass. Note that the Indian rice grass found here is rare in the Yukon but common in southern Saskatchewan. As it only occurs along the old tramline route, some botanists speculate that this plant was imported with the hay used to feed the horses pulling tramcars during the gold rush.

This hill is also home to such plants as the tough and fragrant wild sage and the purple Gorman's Penstemon or Yukon Beardtongue.

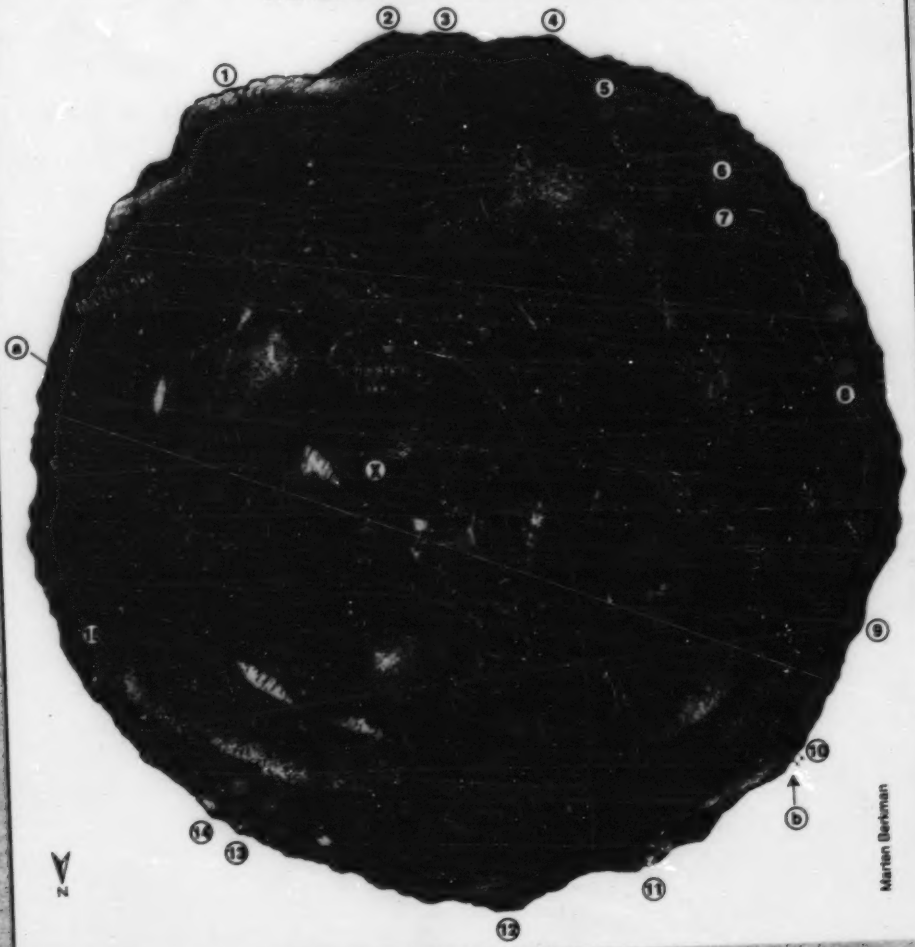
The toppled trees show the effect of the strong winds coming off the lake on the shallow tree roots.

Follow the wide trail — watch your footing on the loose gravel — down to an old roadway across the base of the hill. An old trail then follows a ravine down to the lakeshore where you join the lakeside trail system that makes up Section 3 of the trail.



A bird's-eye view

Imagine that it's a clear day and you are an eagle soaring high over the trail on the lookout hill. Here's what you might see.



	Height m	Distance km
① Mount Lorne	2021	32
② Nares Mountain	1775	61
③ Caribou Mountain	1721	51
④ Montana Mountain	2219	72
⑤ Grey Ridge	1959	42
⑥ Golden Horn Mountain	1710	15
⑦ Mount Sima	1147	10
⑧ Mount McIntyre	1597	10
⑨ Mount Ingram	2157	32
⑩ Mount Sumanik	1702	17
⑪ Pilot Mountain	2054	45
⑫ Flat Mountain	1935	39
⑬ Lime Peak	1616	42
⑭ Mount Laurier	1779	39
⑮ Grey Mountain	1493	8

ⓐ Northwestel's two microwave towers, 91 m and 38 m high, are at 1310 m on a shoulder of Grey Mountain, 9 km away.

ⓑ Yukon Energy's wind turbines, 30 m and 37 m high, are at 1430 m on Haeckel Hill, 12 km away.

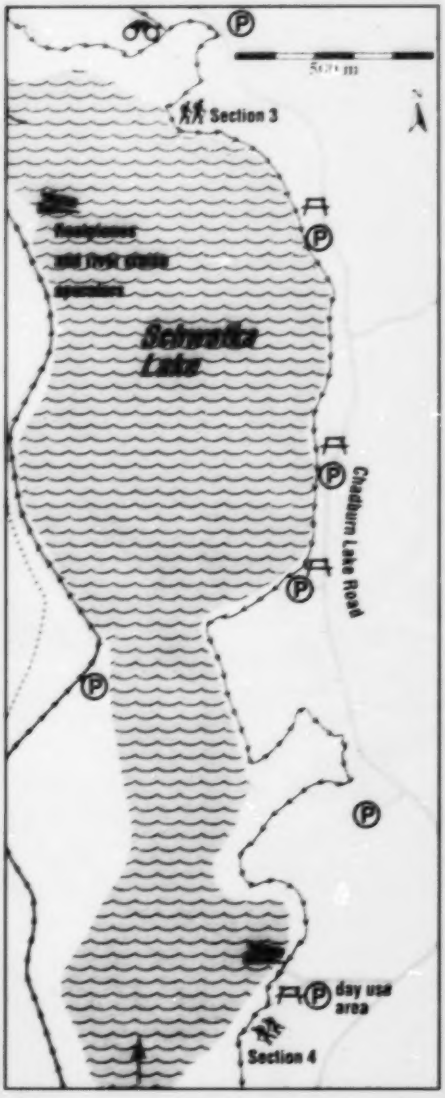
Section 3

Schwatka Lake: lookout hill to day use area

Distance: 3.5 kilometres

Time: 60 to 90 minutes

Difficulty: The trail here is level and follows the lakeshore until it turns inland to bypass the sometimes swampy shoreline trail. There is a steep descent on loose gravel to the day use area.



Parking and starting points: Descend the hill described in Section 2 to pick up this trail or start at one of the picnic sites dotted along the side of the lake, off the Chadburn Lake Road.

Along the trail: When the dam was completed in 1958, it stemmed the flow of the Yukon River, backing up its waters and flooding out the Whitehorse Rapids and a large meadow that was once an important First Nations berry picking area. The water level is about 12 metres higher since the dam was built. Due to the porosity of the local rock, water levels also rose in several of the surrounding pothole lakes.

The City of Whitehorse gets most of its drinking water from Schwatka Lake.

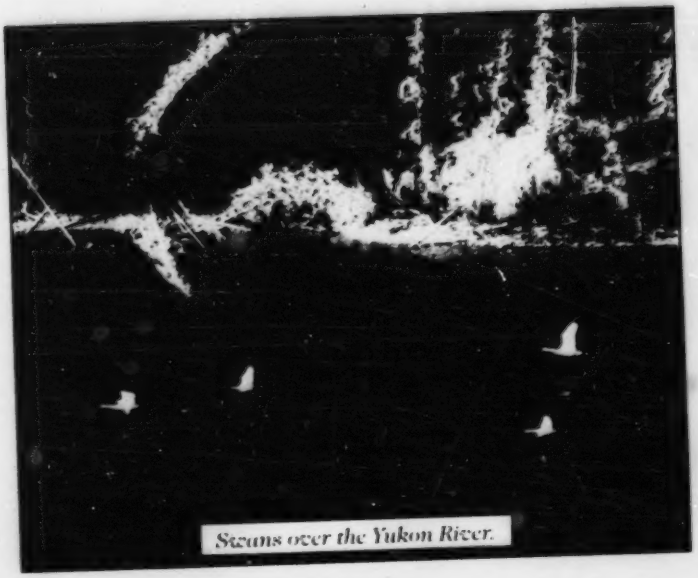
The lake is named after the American explorer, Frederick Schwatka. In 1883, he and his party travelled by raft down the Yukon River to its mouth at the Bering Sea, describing and mapping what they saw along the way.

(Over a century later, northerners are still annoyed by his habit of naming many major features after his patrons, ignoring local names. Miles Canyon is named after Schwatka's superior, General Nelson R. Miles.)

Schwatka Lake is an important staging area for waterfowl. As soon as the ice begins to clear in the spring, ducks, geese, loons and swans can be seen here. Some of the more common ducks include Mallards, Barrow's Goldeneyes, scaups, Buffleheads and scotors. You can also see a variety of grebes and mergansers. Perhaps the most spectacular sight is the swans.

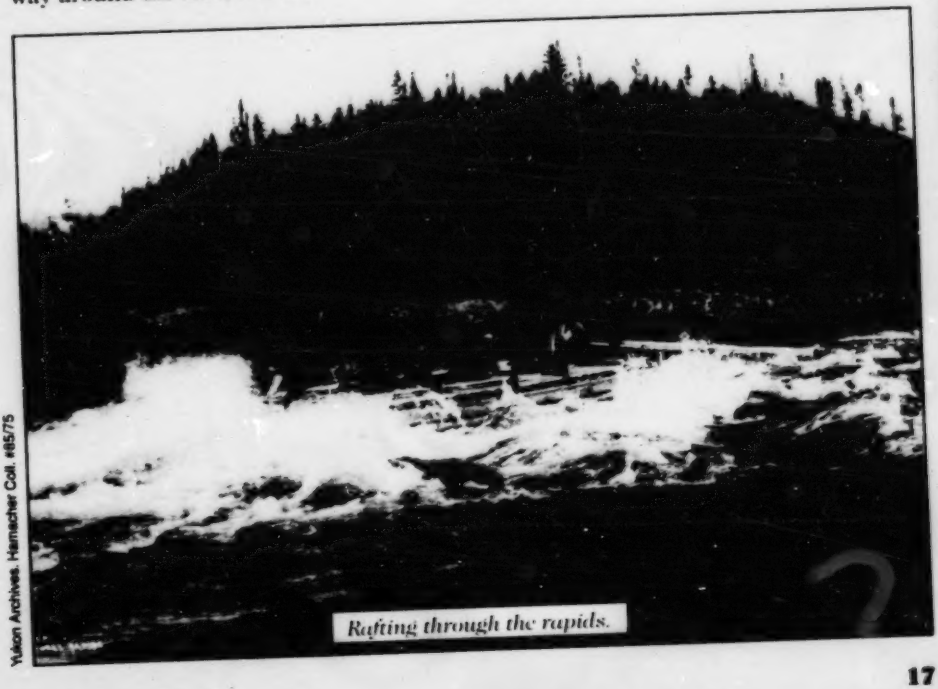
There are both Trumpeter and the less common Tundra swans on the lake in the spring migration.

The trail follows the lakeshore through open pine from picnic spot to picnic spot. You will see lodgepole pine, the only type of pine that grows in the Whitehorse area. You can distinguish them from spruce by their longer needles. Some of the pines may have bark scraped off, right down to the trunk, the work of porcupines who eat the soft inner bark. If they peel the bark all the way around the tree, it dies.



Swans over the Yukon River.

The lake narrows as it approaches Miles Canyon, with its low, reddish brown basalt cliffs jutting into the water. Section 4 starts on the other side of the day use area.



Rafting through the rapids.

Yukon Archives, Hamacher Coll. #85/75

Section 4

Miles Canyon: day use area to Canyon City

Distance: 2.5 kilometres

Time: 30 to 40 minutes

Difficulty: This is a level to gently sloping trail along old tramline rail bed.

Parking and starting point: Park at the Schwatka Lake day use area. The trailhead is to the south (left as you look at the water) of the boat launch. Continue going straight on the main trail, ignoring any side trails, and soon you will be on the yellow trail of the Canyon City ski trail system.

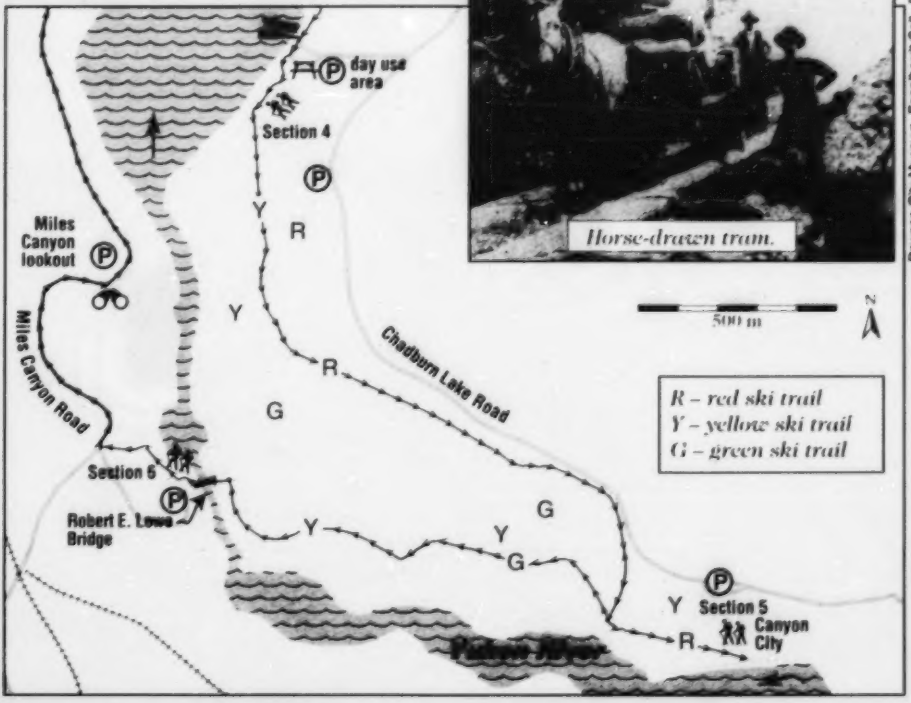
An alternate starting point for this section is at the trailhead for the Canyon City ski trails. From here, take the red trail. (To get to Canyon City, you can also park near Canyon City, about six kilometres down the Chadburn Lake Road. Or, use the Miles Canyon parking area off the Miles Canyon Road on the west side of the river.)

Along the trail: You will be walking through spruce and pine forests. Soon, the yellow trail goes up the side of a hill and meets the red ski trail. Take the red trail to reach Canyon City. (The yellow trail will take you to the suspension bridge, the destination of Section 5.)

This main trail to Canyon City — and the easiest, and straightest — follows the Canyon and White Horse Rapids

Horse-drawn tram.

Dawson City Museum, Engelhardt Coll., PH984R.27.1.12



Tramway roadbed. You can distinguish it from the other trails as it is broad, straight, and has a very gentle grade.

There is evidence that the Canyon City area was used regularly as a camp by First Nations people.

At the beginning of the gold rush, over 1,000 boats were jammed above Miles Canyon. Superintendent Sam Steele of the Northwest Mounted Police decreed that inexperienced boaters could not take their own boats and rafts through the rapids. For a fee, experienced river pilots steered the craft through. Many people chose to portage around the hazard.

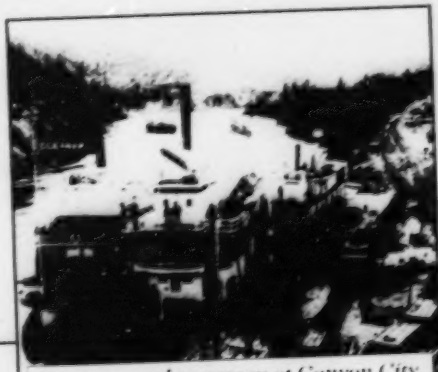
In just 21 days, 18 workers built a tramline on the east bank with logs shaped into wooden rails. It began at Canyon City and ended below the rapids. Horse-drawn carts then carried supplies and small boats around the rapids.

Canyon City quickly became a bustling gold rush community, boasting a roadhouse, ticket office, bonded warehouse, stables and Northwest Mounted Police post.

Now, little remains at Canyon City but some building foundations. Along the trail, you may see remnants of the tramway ties embedded in the ground.

Plants here include strawberries, wild rose and yarrow.

A trail goes up the bluff, just past Canyon City. It is the traditional trail that runs from Marsh Lake to Lake Laberge. If you take it, you will be rewarded with wonderful views of the Yukon River and surrounding areas.



Steamers and tramway at Canyon City.

Miles Canyon at low water, spring 1899.

Yukon Archives, Emil Forrest Coll. #80/60, 7/; (inset) Yukon Archives, E.A. Hegg Coll. #2696

Section 5

Miles Canyon: Canyon City to Robert E. Lowe Bridge

Distance: 1.75 kilometres

Time: 25 to 35 minutes

Difficulty: There's a slow climb from Canyon City, with a final descent to the bridge. Please keep off the trails right along the rim of the canyon.

On the yellow ski trail.

Parking and starting point: Park at the Canyon City parking area, along the Chadburn Lake Road. (Use the map for Section 4, page 18.)

Along the trail: Take the red trail from Canyon City, following the signs for Miles Canyon. Stay left on the yellow trail where the red intersects it. You'll also be on the green trail for a short distance, rejoining the yellow trail again as you descend to the canyon.

This area has always been a popular one for hikers and sightseers. The rapids were very dramatic before they were flooded out, but the steep canyon walls and fast current are still impressive. Throughout the area, there is a tangle of trails made over the years.

The rough rock walls were formed from columnar basalt created from an ancient lava flow. The orange lichen on the rocks typically grows where birds nest and perch.

On the hillsides and rocks, you will find plants that have adapted to the dry conditions in the canyon. This is a favourite place to hunt for crocus in early spring and to see the cushions of matted saxifrage in June.

The 26-metre-long Robert E. Lowe suspension bridge, originally built in 1922, was the first to span the Yukon River. It was named after a local entrepreneur and politician who sat on the Territorial Council and served as speaker of the house. The bridge was rebuilt in the early 1970s.

River otters can often be seen feeding in the whirlpools near the bridge.

Cross the bridge to start Section 6, which takes you back to the dam along the west side of the Yukon River. (Or continue on the yellow trail back to the trailhead for Section 4.)

Lord and Lady Byng at the dedication of the Robert E. Lowe bridge, 1922.

Steamers at Canyon City.

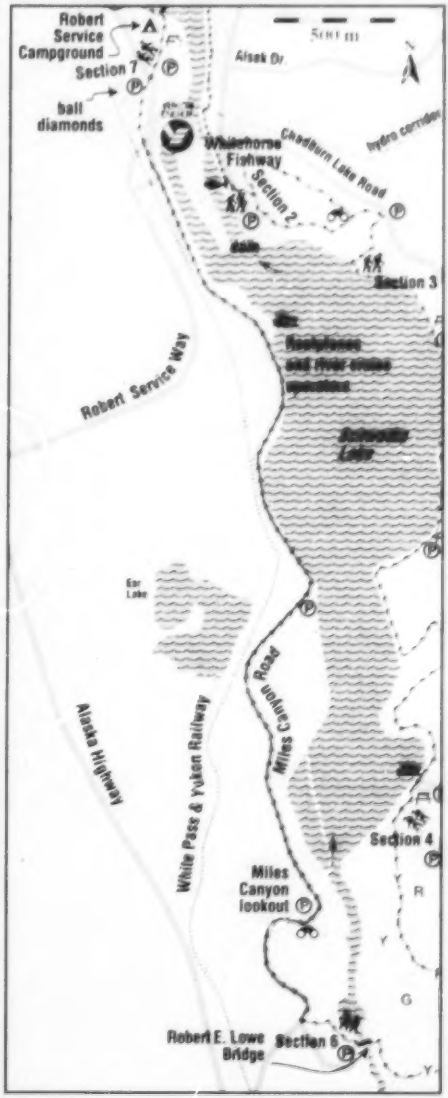
Section 6

Miles Canyon Road: Robert E. Lowe Bridge to Robert Service Campground

Distance: 5.5 kilometres

Time: 60 to 90 minutes

Difficulty: The trail follows the Miles Canyon Road, which is a steep, scenic alternate route from the Alaska Highway to downtown, open only in the summer. There is not a lot of traffic, though tour buses often use this route. Remember to walk facing traffic.



Parking and starting spot: Park at the Robert E. Lowe Bridge off the Miles Canyon Road. Take the trail that goes up the hillside through the woods downstream of the bridge or go through the parking lot and follow the road to the top of the hill.

Along the trail: From the top of the hill, it's a short walk to see the old tramway trail. Take the trail back towards the canyon. The trail crosses the clearing just where the road bends to the left (west) away from the canyon. This is likely a portion of John Hepburn's Miles Canyon & Lewes River Tramway.

Unlike the tramline owned by Macaulay on the opposite side of the river, this tramline used squared timber rails. The line was 10 kilometres long and extended from a point about one kilometre upstream and across the river from Canyon City, to the present site of the Robert Service Campground. Once the railway to Whitehorse was complete, the tramlines fell into disuse.

In later years, the tramline bed may have been used as a logging road. Logging was an important industry in the Yukon as the sternwheelers had a nearly insatiable appetite for fuel. In the winter, the houses were heated by woodstoves. Many areas were logged for up to a kilometre back from the water.

Along some parts of the tramway trail, you can still see wire in the trees. This is the remains of the old telegraph system that followed the tramline.

The tramway trail is treacherous in places so return to the Miles Canyon Road and start walking north. Along the way, look out for brown bird houses nailed to the trees. These were put up by schoolchildren many years ago. Note how the old road cuts back and forth.

At the foot of the last long hill of the Miles Canyon Road, you will see a small cabin with a fenced yard on the left (west) side of the road. It was originally built on the edge of the meadow that became Schwatka Lake and was moved here when the dam was built. As you continue along the road, look at the low hill across the lake and at the photos on this page and page 17. Notice how the river has changed.

This area is a popular place for viewing migrating waterfowl in the spring and fall. The river here is also home to a number of floatplane and river tour operations.

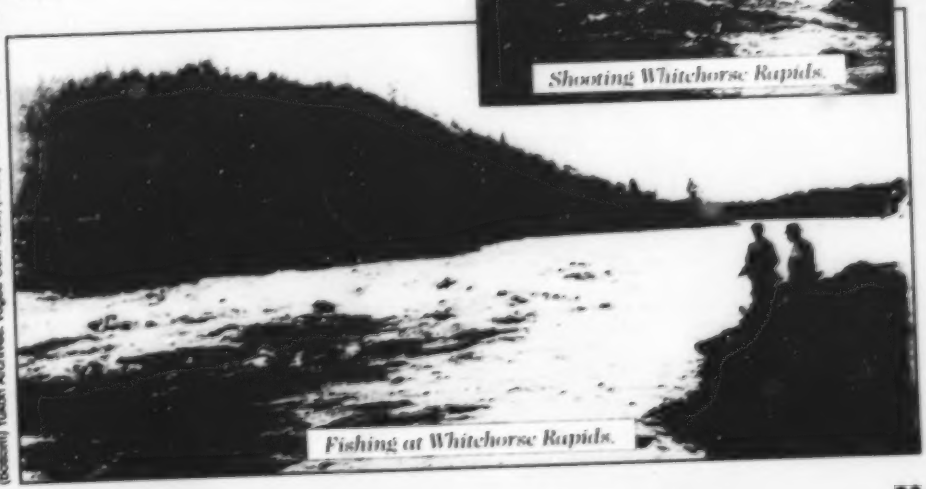
Near the end of the road, you will be walking beside a long berm on your right. This is the dyke which holds the water in the power dam canal. To your left, you can see the White Pass and Yukon Railway tracks as they come into town. The railway stopped regular service in 1982.

The main road turns left to join Robert Service Way. You should keep going straight, on the private entry road that leads towards the Yukon Energy Corporation site. Where this road makes a sharp right, continue straight ahead and pass between the large boulders. You are now at Robert Service Way.

To avoid walking in the ditch on the wrong side of the road, cross over to the ball diamonds, making your way over to the entrance to the parking lot. Once there, cross back over Robert Service Way to the entrance to Robert Service Campground and the beginning of Section 7.

(The ridge coming down behind the ball diamonds gives access to the airport trail that runs along the bluffs above town. From this trail, you have fine views of the city and river valley.)

Shooting Whitehorse Rapids.



Fishing at Whitehorse Rapids.

(bottom) Yukon Archives, Vogee Coll. #268; (inset) A.E. "Sandy" Yeulet Coll. 83/51#83151

Section 7

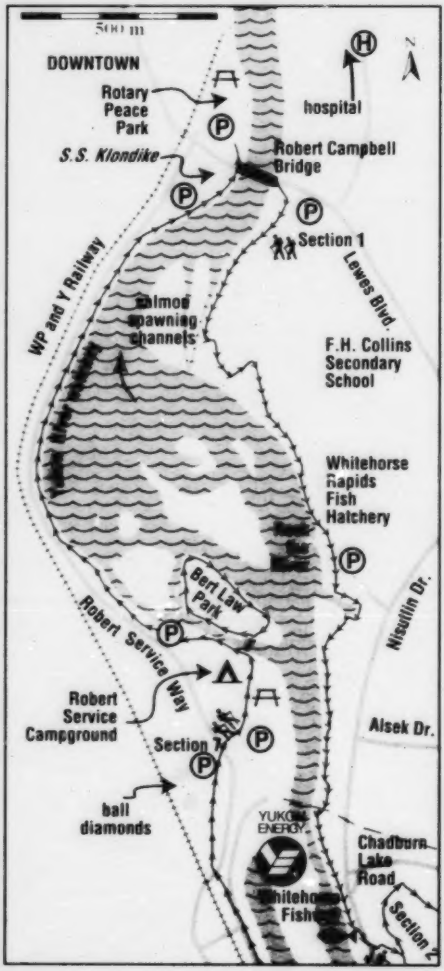
Yukon River walkway: Robert Service Campground to Robert Campbell Bridge

Distance: 2 kilometres

Time: 20 to 30 minutes

Difficulty: Very easy. Most of this section is on paved walkway.

Parking and starting point: Park in the parking lot of either the Robert Service Campground or the ball diamonds.



Along the trail: Robert Service Campground gets its name from Robert W. Service, who was known as the "bard of the Yukon." He is best known for his poems, "The Cremation of Sam McGee" and "The Shooting of Dan McGrew."

First Nations elders tell us that the campground itself was a popular fish camp for many generations. There was also a First Nations village on the other side of the road, near the ball diamonds.

In the 1920s, a picnic shelter was built at the site of today's campground because it was a popular spot with the people in town. Today's campground features a day use area, overnight tenting sites, washrooms, a concession and Bert Law Park.

This lovely island park, named in memory of a city councillor who spent a good deal of time here, can be reached by walking towards the water from the concession. At the shore, you will come upon a bailey bridge that crosses to the island. Once there, turn left onto a delightful trail that follows the perimeter of the island. Some people say that, on a rainy day, it's as close to a rain forest as you will find in this part of the north!

Just past the campground, heading downtown, is a paved walkway that follows along the edge of the Yukon River. Along the route, there are interpretive panels that provide information on the Yukon River, salmon, First Nations, the steamer *Canadian*, the founding of Whitehorse, and the White Pass & Yukon Route.

Since the completion of the dam, the mid-river sandbars and islands have become important stopover spots for waterfowl and marsh birds.

Where the land widens out past the clay cliffs (and there are now houses and an apartment building), was once

Martha Louise Black (left) and other members of the IODE, at Robert Service Camp.

the yards of the White Pass and Yukon Railway. These were relocated north of the White Pass depot in the early 1950s.

The trail ends at the *S.S. Klondike* National Historic Site. This boat is one of the two remaining, intact sternwheelers which were the lifeline of the Yukon until 1988. (In that year, all Yukon communities, with the exception of Old Crow, were finally connected by road.) At one time, over 250 sternwheelers plied the Yukon River. Touring the restored ship is recommended.

From the *S.S. Klondike* you can continue on the sidewalk that passes under the bridge. This waterfront trail will take you through to Rotary Peace Park. The trail continues along the waterfront to downtown and then all the way north to Kishwoot Island.

References

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Yukon Archives, MacBride Museum Coll. Volume 2, #3664

Martha Louise Black (left) and other members of the IODE, at Robert Service Camp.

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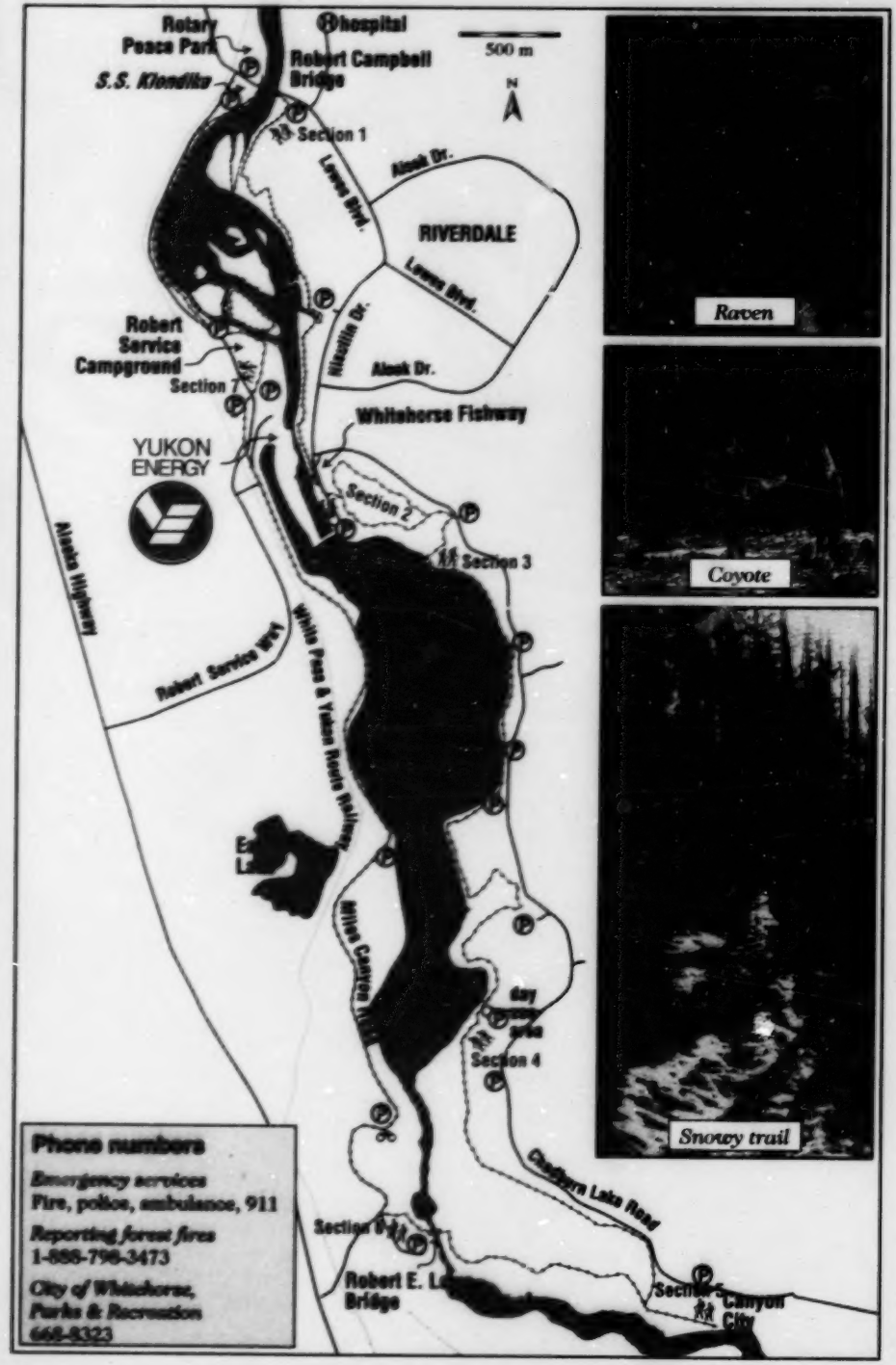
Rotary Peace Park
S.S. Klondike
Robert Campbell Bridge
Hospital
500 m
N
Section 1
Lewes Blvd.
Alsek Dr.
RIVERDALE
Lewes Blvd.
Nisutlin Dr.
Alsek Dr.
Robert Service Campground
Section 7
Whitehorse Fishway
YUKON ENERGY
Section 2
Section 3
Alaska Highway
Robert Service Way
White Pass & Yukon Route Railway
Miles Canyon
day use area
Section 4
Chadburn Lake Road
Section 5
Robert E. Lee Bridge
Section 6
Canyon City
Raven
Coyote
Snowy trail
Phone numbers
Emergency services
Fire, police, ambulance, 911
Reporting forest fires
1-888-798-3473
City of Whitehorse, Parks & Recreation
668-8323